

On Tuesday, President Bush delivered his seventh State of the Union Address. The President has made many promises in his prior State of the Union Addresses, but unfortunately, he has failed to keep them. Once again, it was possible to be encouraged by a number of things the President said, but that optimism is tempered by his failure to deliver on those issues in the past.

Iraq In his 2006 State of the Union Address, President Bush promised, "As we make progress on the ground, and Iraqi forces increasingly take the lead, we should be able to further decrease our troop levels -- but those decisions will be made by our military commanders, not by politicians in Washington, D.C." This year, the President has called for an additional 21,500 troops to be deployed to Iraq. This escalation goes against the wishes of top military officials, Congressional Democrats, an increasing number of Republicans and, most importantly, the American people. I believe the negative impacts on our military readiness and troop and family morale of this escalation are too great. We are planning to hold an up-or-down vote in Congress on the president's plan, and hope that the outcome will help make us safer and bring our troops home sooner:

- Shifting the principal mission of our forces from combat to training, logistics, force protection, and activities to counter terrorism;
- Beginning the phased redeployment of our forces in the next four to six months; and
- Implementing an aggressive diplomatic strategy, both within the region and beyond, to help the Iraqis achieve a sustainable political settlement, including amending their constitution.

Energy In each of his State of the Union Addresses, President Bush has promised to deal with high energy prices and our nation's dependence on foreign oil. Last year, President Bush declared America "addicted to oil," but then the following week his annual budget request shortchanged the development of the alternative fuels and technologies needed to make America energy independent.

Democrats are already putting America on the path to energy independence by passing legislation to cut huge subsidies to Big Oil and invest in the alternative fuels and technologies needed to protect our national security, our economy, and the future of our planet. We want to work with President Bush in a bipartisan fashion on energy and global warming, but he needs to put science before special interests. In the 110th Congress, I am making global warming one of my highest priorities, and I believe that to address this problem, the rest of the nation must follow California's lead in the area of energy conservation.

Health This week was also not the first time the President proposed efforts to fix our health care system. In his 2003 State of the Union Address, he said, “Our second goal is high quality, affordable health care for all Americans.” The reality does not match the rhetoric, however - since the President took office, the number of uninsured Americans has increased from 40 million to over 47 million today. At the same time the President says he wants to make tax cuts that benefit the wealthiest Americans permanent, he is proposing to shift more of the cost of health care onto working Americans. While the President favors the use of tax credits to improve the availability of private individual insurance coverage, these proposals would not provide enough money to pay a substantial portion of the premiums for a decent private policy.

Immigration Democrats have long called for strong border security, effective law enforcement, and comprehensive immigration reform. While the President has talked of the need for immigration reform during his last several State of the Union Addresses, he has consistently cut funding for the Department of Homeland Security and immigration agencies in every budget submitted to Congress since the agency was created.

I believe we can make America stronger, not only at our border, but in upholding our values and principles and by honoring the tradition of providing a safe haven to immigrants seeking a better life, and I intend to pursue comprehensive immigration reform to achieve this goal.

Education President Bush’s approach to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act – “reauthorize this good law” – is reminiscent of his stay the course strategy in Iraq. NCLB is in need of significant revision, and increased financial commitment. The schools that President Bush calls “Failing Schools” are schools that we have failed. We have failed to provide them the resources they need to effectively teach students with special needs, English Language Learners, students from low income backgrounds, and students of color. The commitment to test students and label schools has not been matched by an equal commitment to provide the funding for the resources and assistance these schools need.

The President talked about giving schools “flexibility,” but unfortunately his idea of flexibility starts and ends at vouchers for private schools. Vouchers are not the answer. Diverting public education funds to private schools will only make the problem worse. Instead, we should focus on measures to improve public schools and the structures that fund them, and giving states the flexibility they need to implement NCLB’s requirements intelligently and effectively.

Budget The President's call for fiscal discipline through balancing the budget and reducing the number of "earmarks" stands in stark contrast the record of his Administration and his Republican colleagues in Congress over the past six years. The \$128 billion budget surplus that existed when President Bush took office disappeared in the first budget he submitted to Congress in 2001 and has steadily grown in the last several years due to his pursuit of tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, failed leadership in the war on terrorism, and a Republican led Congress that increased federal spending. For Fiscal Year 2006, the budget deficit totaled \$426 billion.

Last November, America took the first step in choosing a new direction and asking our leaders to work together. Democrats are already working in a bipartisan fashion to deliver results for the American people. With the completion of our First 100 Hours legislative package, which passed the House with broad bipartisan support, we have taken action to restore honesty and openness in government, re-establish fiscal responsibility, strengthen our national security, end taxpayer-funded subsidies for Big Oil and create a Strategic Energy and Renewables Reserve, and give more Americans a realistic shot at the American Dream. The new Democratic Majority is committed to real and lasting results for all Americans.